

Partnership and Outreach to the Southern Ute Tribe Gold King Mine Blowout Incident Talking Points

Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Notification Response:

The Southern Ute Tribe received notification on August 5, 2015 from Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Mr. Tom Johnson, Southern Ute Indian Tribe (SUIT) Environmental Programs Department Head notified Scott Clow, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Environmental Director on August 8, 2015.

- On August 7, 2015, Region 8 Administrator, Mr. Shaun McGrath, sent a letter to the Southern Ute Chairman, Honorable Clement Frost. The letter gave the tribe notice that we (EPA) would be conducting sampling and investigations in the Animas River on the Southern Ute Indian Reservation and would coordinate efforts through Mr. Tom Johnson, Tribal Environmental Programs Division Head.
- Randy Brown, Tribal Program Manager EPA Region 8 was deployed to the Durango Incident Command as the Tribal Liaison from August 10-19, 2015.
- On August 11, 2015, Mr. Brown contacted Mr. Scott Clow, Environmental Director, Ute Mountain Ute (UMU) tribe regarding appropriate communication and coordination activities. Throughout the deployment, Mr. Brown periodically checked-in with Mr. Clow.
- His next deployment will be from September 15-29, 2015.

Navajo Nations Response: Laura Ebbert, R9 Tribal Programs Director was deployed to the Navajo Nation. For more information, please contact her at 415- 947-3561.

Southern Ute Tribe Joins Unified Command:

- On August 8, 2015, Kathi Gurule, Risk and Emergency Manager, SUIT was asked by LaPlata County Butch Knowlton how she wanted to be involved. Effective immediately, Ms. Gurule, Mr. Mick Souder and Mr. Tom Johnson were assigned to the Durango Unified Command.

Significant Outreach or Communication Events:

- On August 11, 2015, Councilman, Mr. Tyson Thompson and key tribal personnel participated in a Gold King mine tour. The tour also included a presentation of the Red and Bonita mine treatment facility. Tribal personnel voiced their appreciation in being able to visit the site.
- On August 11, 2015, Mr. Shaun McGrath, Mr. Martin Hestmark, and Mr. Randy Brown participated in a Southern Ute Tribal Public Meeting the Three Springs Development, Durango, Colorado.
- On August 12, 2015, UMU Tribal Councilwoman, Regina White Skunk and SUIT Councilwoman, Ramona Eagle attended the meeting with EPA Administrator, Gina McCarthy.
- On August 15, 2015, Mr. Randy Brown participated in a second Southern Ute Tribal Public Meeting at the Sunnyside Elementary School.
- The Southern Ute Tribe developed their own Incident Command structure at the

Tribal Administration Building in Ignacio, Colorado. The purpose of these meetings were to inform staff, management and membership on the on-going investigation and cleanup efforts of the Durango, Colorado Unified Command.

- Mr. Brown participated in these tribal specific meetings on a daily basis.

Other Important Facts or Lessons:

- 1) Communication and coordination were the initial issues raised by tribal membership. Especially from tribal members with domestic wells adjacent to the Animas River. They were eager to learn if their water was safe to use.
- 2) In a response action of this magnitude, it is difficult to determine who needs to know, what do they need to know, and when do they need to be informed. This issue is always difficult to capture the full universe of potential impacted parties.
- 3) At the first tribal public meeting, tribal members expressed their interest in knowing if the water was safe to use? Questions regarding use included: drinking, showering, dishes, laundry, gardening and irrigation. EPA acknowledged that prior to making a decision, incident command personnel must collect, analysis, assess and validate the data and sometimes this can 5-7 days.
- 4) The Southern Ute Indian Tribe role in the Unified Command proved to be an invaluable asset for several reasons. First, tribal water quality program personnel are extremely professional and capable and secondly, the tribe provided background surface water quality data (that didn't exist anywhere else) to further assist the unified command in making key technical decisions.
- 5) The presence and involvement of EPA senior leadership including EPA Administrator, Region 8 Administrator, and Assistant Regional Administrator.
- 6) Having an ICS credentialed, technically competent on-site tribal liaison assigned to the unified command proved invaluable. Especially, when incidents have the potential to impact several different tribal jurisdictions. The EPA Region 8 recognizes and takes serious, the importance of our government-to-government responsibility to sovereign nations.